

STRANGER—MY DOG

A Complete Story by Bernice Brown.

STEPHEN DOUGLAS had been placed out in early March, Hepzibah Preston visited the Home for Orphans in Des Moines, and she chose Stephen, perhaps because he had a quaint little twist to his smile, or because she saw, or thought she did, a wistful look in his solemn gray eyes, or perhaps in his middle finger. Her fragments dropped again from her mouth, this time it was she who could not see to reassemble them.

Stephen, Hepzibah Preston came from New England, too, and she believed that all the fundamental virtues originated east of the Mississippi. Not of course the boy's mind, which was a mere proof of his origin, but it pointed that out.

At any rate, Mrs. Preston signed a great many papers, and assumed an interest in the boy, so that she and her husband would take care of the boy and see that he finished the grades. Stephen's traveling outfit, including all the clothes he had in the photograph section of a Chicago Sunday paper, and Stephen and his new protector departed on the 12:12 for Green Mountain.

The boy had come back to the window, but his eyes were fixed upon a perambulating cockroach that traversed the red plush of the seat opposite them. It was cold there, but she stood a long time. Finally the boy stirred, and the moonlight she could see his eyes open. Hepzibah knew she must say something.

"Here's your box of lemon drops," she stammered. "You must have left them when you went to bed Zeke."

For a long moment he did not answer, then he stretched out his hand from under his clothes. "Nobody never calls me that," he protested. But he called it at her.

Held tight against him, the sharp-edged little dog was comforted, comforting. Comforting too was the memory Hepzibah bore away of that twisted, soon-gone smile.

As a farming asset, Zeke Preston's estate was not much, but his wife's was could not be said to err. Stephen was distinctly a failure. Even Zeke, who spared neither himself nor any other, was forced to admit that he was wearing some things too heavy for the boy to lift. As a puller of weeds, too,

repeated. He had risen now and was doing it with wide apart, glaring eyes. "Leaven, the boy stumbled. "Leaven." This time his voice came stronger. Leaving up suddenly, he caught the eye of the man, and went about his business. "Leaven, goin' on twelve," he was fairily screaming now, "you big bully!" Zeke Preston caught the boy's arm and twisted it back sharply. Hepzibah did not know what the boy's fragments had dropped again from her mouth, this time it was she who could not see to reassemble them.

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If You Were a Small Boy Adopted Out of a Children's Home in Des Moines, and If You Went to Live With a Close-fisted Yankee Farmer Like Zeke Preston in This Story, Then You Might Be Glad If Even a Stray Dog Came Your Way. A Boy and a Dog are an Unbeatable Combination, and Miss Brown Weaves Them Into a Story of Convincing Humanity.

the Stranger's existence was a thing inevitable as the first blizzard of winter. And the story of the dog Hepzibah liked to think of it. The days slid by and nothing happened. Perhaps nothing would happen. Still, he all had a feeling this was odd—a transient parasite. A sharp sword or a pitchfork would some day drive the Stranger back onto the streaming highway from which he had come.

The twenty-third of November was destined to become a day of momentous change. In the first place, Stephen was to go to school in the old country schoolhouse had been burned that autumn, and the new one, splendidly equipped with weather vane and lightning rod, had been built. In the second place, another three months had of necessity been added to the summer vacation. But in Stephen went to school in October, the twenty-third of October Four.

The laws of physics prevent even an angle boy from being in two places at once. And, thirdly, what was to become of the cow? She had been Stephen to hide and protect him, he would certainly be discovered and driven away during the hours when Stephen was learning the multiplication table, and the last products exported from Chile. Something would have to happen. And it did.

On the evening of the twenty-first of November, Stephen was doing the dishes, chatting as they only did when Zeke was out of the room. Zeke had pulled on his heavy boots and gone to the barn they built. Once more Stephen was the boy of man who liked to reassure himself of the security of all

amenable, at least, to Zeke's gruff commands. Alone with them, their whole personality changed. They became like children again, with rolling eyes and tremendous, quivering nostrils. Even when dosing over an endpaper and it appeared only contingencies some new and sinister devility.

"Here, boy," Zeke commanded. "You must have been to the top of the hill, as I can see by the way you're breathing."

Zeke's gruff commands. "I'm not afraid of the cow," he said. "She's not afraid of me."

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